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Sent: Thursday, December 31, 2009 12:02 PM
To: Hanchett, James (DPH)
Subject: A New Year's Message from Secretary Bigby

Dear EOHHS colleague,

As we prepare to ring in a New Year, I want to take time to thank you for the contributions you made to our many accomplishments in 2009. No doubt, this past year has been full of challenges as we have struggled to address a significant state budget gap. We have tried to minimize the effects of cuts on the people we serve, on the programs we care about, and on our workforce; but in spite of our efforts, I know that some of these decisions have been difficult. Thank you all for your commitment and strength throughout these difficult times. In spite of these challenges, we have a lot to be proud of. Because of you, we accomplished some extraordinary things! Please join me in celebrating these accomplishments:

In 2009, Massachusetts had the lowest rate of uninsured residents of any state in the country. In spite of rising unemployment, people in Massachusetts continue to have access to health insurance, and our state is a model for national health care reform.

This year, the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea welcomed as residents 81 formerly homeless veterans, who now have shelter, food and medical care. Staff at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke offered expanded hospice services for veterans and their families. In partnership with local hospice providers, the program offers end-of-life care with dignity and respect for their brave service to our country.

In **January**, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) completed its Strategic Planning Process, which resulted in the development of an Integrated Casework Practice Model for Massachusetts. This model reflects nationally recognized child welfare practice and features an approach to strengthening families and incorporating family voice in service planning and DCF casework practice.

In **February**, the Division of Health Care Finance and Policy (HCFP) managed the distribution of \$32.6 million in grants and increased Medicaid rate payments to 69 hospitals and community health centers across the Commonwealth through the Essential Community Provider Trust Fund. The administration of this year's awards represented a significant shift in how we distribute funds. Agency leadership and staff thought creatively and proactively to maximize federal matching funds to ensure the most effective use of state dollars to support vital health care providers.

In **April**, the Department of Public Health (DPH) responded quickly and thoughtfully when faced with the discovery of the H1N1 influenza virus as it spread across the country and the Commonwealth. Since then, DPH has managed an aggressive strategy to track the spread and severity of the illness; initiated a multimedia flu prevention campaign; and overseen the widespread distribution of the vaccine across the state.

In **May**, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) announced that it has distributed \$5 million in low-interest loans to people with disabilities as part of its Assistive Technology Loan Program. Through its partnership with Sovereign Bank and Easter Seals, the MRC has enabled more than 300 Massachusetts residents with disabilities and their families to purchase technology and tools that offer them opportunities to lead more independent lives. Hundreds more have benefited from other assistive technology programs.

June brought the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), as the Department of Mental Retardation changed its name. The agency's new name promotes dignity and respect for people with intellectual disabilities, and better reflects the range of consumer supports. Agency leadership and staff were instrumental in seeing the name change become a reality and were passionate advocates for consumers and families. As DDS leads the way toward providing community based supports for people moving from institutions, it is fitting that we recognize the strengths of these individuals.

Between July 2008 and **June 2009**, the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) trained more than 3,000 caseworkers at the Department of Children and Families on best practices in working with deaf and hard of hearing families. This represents cross-agency collaboration at its best!

In **July**, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) implemented the Community Based Flexible Supports (CBFS) system. Designed to promote consumer choice, the system is recovery-oriented and allows people with serious and persistent mental illness to live independently in the community. Currently, CBFS is operating at full enrollment and providing recovery based services to over 2,900 individuals and families.

In **August**, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) completed its sixth summer internship program with 48 interns placed at businesses, schools, state agencies, and non-profit organizations across Massachusetts. As part of the Commonwealth's commitment to promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities, the program supports blind individuals in gaining hands-on work experience that will add to their resume and bring them closer to their career goals.

In **September**, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and the Department of Children and Families launched a listening tour of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. The series of seven meetings offered opportunities to hear about the needs of grandparents raising children in Massachusetts, as well as other family members, health care providers, teachers, social workers and others involved in grandparent-headed families. In 2010, the Commission will recommend policies and strategies to better serve grandparent-headed families.

In **October**, the U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) a High Performance Bonus Award for its exceptional administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for the sixth consecutive year. This \$1.5 million award recognized Massachusetts' leadership in the timely processing of benefits and the extraordinary commitment of its staff in supporting self-sufficiency for its clients.

In **November**, the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) – in partnership with the Governor's Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition – submitted to the Governor the state's *New Americans Agenda*, a set recommendations for how we can better integrate immigrants and refugees into the social, civic and economic life of the Commonwealth. Currently, ORI is working with its partners to develop an action plan for how to implement some of these recommendations.

Also in **November**, the Office of Medicaid and DPH announced that the new MassHealth smoking cessation benefit is already paying off. In just one year, members who took advantage of the benefit to try to quit experienced fewer hospitalizations for heart attacks, fewer emergency and clinic visits for asthma and significant decreases in acute birth complications. Since the benefit went into effect two and a half years ago, more than 75,000 members have used the tobacco cessation benefit.

And in **December**, the Department of Youth Services and its partner agencies launched its Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) in Middlesex County. Building on existing JDAI programs in Worcester and Suffolk Counties, DYS seeks to reduce reliance on secure detention, while maintaining public safety and building a stronger juvenile justice system. Eventually, DYS plans to initiate JDAI programs in all regions across Massachusetts.

Also this year, the Department of Veterans' Services secured more than \$1 million in federal funding to support training, job placement and housing for veterans. Half a million dollars in grant funding from the U.S. Department of Labor will support training and employment in "green" industry professions. An additional \$200,000 will provide training, job placement and housing assistance for veterans on the South Shore, while \$300,000 will support services in Worcester, Fall River, New Bedford, and the surrounding areas.

In every corner of the Commonwealth, we can see the results of all of these achievements, which would not have been possible without your commitment, hard work and dedication, particularly as we have faced one of the most challenging years any of us can remember.

Looking ahead, I am excited about the work that lies before us in 2010. By building on the leadership, enthusiasm and hard work you have shown each and every day during this past year, I know that we will make meaningful contributions to the lives of the diverse populations we serve. We will continue to do our best to fulfill our shared commitment to making people healthier and our communities safer, implementing meaningful and long lasting health care reform, supporting self-sufficiency for individuals and families, and promoting independent living for elders people with disabilities.

With best wishes to you and your family for a healthy and happy 2010,

JudyAnn Bigby, M.D.

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